

Purgatory

On a visit to the modest Martinez adobe in Hoehne, Colorado, young Bobby was asked by his great uncle Andalesseo, if he'd like to join him to the Purgatory River for a load of sand. Andalesseo wanted to add an extra room to the house for his mother Polonia and needed sand to add to the clay and straw.

"Sure! When do we leave?"

They would be leaving as soon as he hitched the horses, and tia Polonia put together a lunch for them. Andalesseo backed his sorrel filly next to her dam. He cooed and gently smacked the horses into place before the old freight wagon. The horses snorted and shifted their weight as Andalesseo adjusted their tack and harness. Bobby bounded out of the kitchen door with a cloth bag, then handed it to his uncle.

"OK boy, up you go!"

Giving a boost to his tall, lanky 8-year-old nephew, Andalesseo took his place on the spring mounted seat next to Bobby. With a simple, guttural 'cluck cluck' the horses leaned into their harness. Tia Polonia stood by the kitchen door, wiping her hands on her calico apron. She waved at the boys as the team plodded down the dusty road.

Uncle and nephew talked, joked and laughed over the bumpy 5-mile trek, to a shallow sandbar on the Purgatory River. Andalesseo backed his team close to the sandy shore. Bobby lunged off the wagon and headed towards the river's edge.

"Don't go into the water too far boy!"

Andalesseo reminded Bobby of their earlier talk about safety. Whether Bobby heard him or not was questionable. Andalesseo stepped down off the wagon and ran his hands over his horses with soft praise, picking up each hoof to look for stones. Satisfied, he grabbed his shovel and began to sling sand onto an old canvas tarp, in the bed of the wagon.

The joy of youth often meant missing out on hard physical labor. Bobby was enthralled with the new sights of rushing water, and the pungent smell of wet earth. With stones and sticks broken from the nearby willows, Bobby scrapped together sand to make his own little fort. Bobby stepped out into the river, mid-calf, and pushed waves of water onto his tiny fortress. Before long, the fort disintegrated into a lump of wet sand. Bobby turned his attention to the glitter of pebbles underwater. Further he strayed to reach a pretty stone.

"I was at the edge of the water playin and making little sandcastles...then watch the water wash it away real slow. Then tio Andalesseo come up behind me, picked me up by the rear of my pants and my (collar) and threw me in the damn river! "

Immersed over his head, Bobby flailed and struggled for the surface of the water. He gulped air as he felt the terror of no foothold. Splashing and crying for what seemed an eternity, the iron grip of his uncle snatched the boy up from the water. Holding onto his nephew by the collar was like holding the scruff of a wildcat. Flailing arms caught Andalesseo in the nose. Blood spurted everywhere, prompting him to drop the terrified boy.

"Then he dropped me back in the water! Next time he didn't grab me where I could punch him again...he grabbed me by the ankle and drug me out and threw me (on the riverbank). Then he said, 'Now you stay there!' I was crying and bawlin all the way home."

Late afternoon they arrived home. Bobby bolted from the wagon into the old adobe, still sniffing and gulping air - tio Andalesseo not far behind. They were both confronted by tia Polonia, hands perched on her ample hips.

"So, what happened to you?"

Whining and sniffing, Bobby replied, "He trued mee in dah wader!"

Andalesseo started laughing again, but Polonia frowned and spoke to him sharply in their native tongue.

"She told him something in Hopi I guess it was. And when he told her the story in Hopi, she started laughing too! She was laughing so damn hard that her belly was bouncing up and down! (I got mad) and stepped on her (sandals) with my bare feet then ran out the door! I hid in the pig sty until almost dark....and the pigs started commin in, trying to push me outta their house. After I calmed down, my uncle told me why he did it and it was OK with me."

Tio Andalesseo explained that you should never get into something, you don't know how to get out of.

"The next time we went for more sand, he jumped in too, clothes and all and he had a bar of soap."

Undoubtedly from tia Polonia.